Bhagavad-Gita (cont.)

A) “Knowledge means humility . . .” (116).

What to make of masculine/feminine opposition in “uninvolvement/with sons, wife, and home” (116)?

interpretation key:
masculine independence à la Rousseau?
or a warning against a possessive version of love & authority?
Introduction to *kathakali*

Kerala region

“classical dance” form, consolidated ca. 16\(^{th}\)-17\(^{th}\) centuries

many other & older Indian & Sanskrit forms

Bharata, *Natyashastra* (ca. 1\(^{st}\) cent BCE-1\(^{st}\) cent AD)

Kalidasa, *Sakuntula* (5\(^{th}\) cent AD)

performed outdoors at night

performers principally men & boys (some exceptions)

*mudras*: hand signs

*bhavas*: internal states, expressed by face, eyes, breathing

masks & class, immanent vs evolutionary notion of self

Arjun Raina

demonstration of states

Bhima’s rage at molesting of Draupadi
Performing the Past,
Wint 2000, Lecture 10

Phillip Zarrilli,
*Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play*: 73-80.

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**Basic training (first year)**

During his first year of training the student concentrates on body-preparation and the rudiments of technique which provide the foundation for acting and dancing. After the early morning massage and body-preparation class, the remainder of his day is devoted to learning the basic exercises and techniques which constitute *kathakali*’s expressive vocabulary. Broken down from their composite forms into their most basic units for initial training, these techniques include the twenty-four basic hand-gestures (*mudra*), eight different ways of performing hand-gestures while acting, nine basic facial expressions (*navarasas*), rhythmic patterns, choreography and movement patterns, including preliminary dances (*totayam* and *purappattu*), circling patterns (*cuyippu*), which combine basic hand-gestures, rhythmic patterns, and specific focus of the eyes, and the dance patterns (*kalasam* and *irattu*), which punctuate delivery of the texts.

Since hand-gestures and facial expressions are the expressive means through which the actor conveys a character’s states of being/doing (*bhava*) within the dramatic context of each story, the young actor must technically master each gesture and expression. This means exercising his fingers, wrists, hands, as well as each set of facial muscles (cheeks, lips, etc.) required to embody each expressive state fully.

*Kathakali*’s language of gesture is part of its inheritance from the *Natyasastra* via *kutiyattam*. Both *kathakali* and *kutiyattam* base their gesture language with twenty-four root *mudras* (Plate 4.2) on a regional text, the *Hastalakshanadipika* – a catalogue of basic hand poses with lists of words which each pose represents (see Premakumar 1948; Venu 1984; Richmond 1999). While a common heritage and set of root *mudras* exist, many variations between the two have developed over the years.

Both *mudra* and *hasta* refer to the twenty-four root gestures performed with a single hand (*asamyukta*), combined hands (*samyukta*), or mixed hands (*misra*). Meanings are only created when the actor uses the basic alphabet to ‘speak’
Performing the Past,
Wint 2000, Lecture 10

with his hands’ in a dramatic context. The
student’s training in hand-gestures begins by
learning each of the twenty-four root gestures,
and then quickly moving on to learning
‘mimetic hands,’ usually beginning with the
times of various Hindu gods such as Vishnu:

Beginning with both hands above the head
is anjal, the hands move out at forehead
level where they open into kamsapākṣa. As
the hands extend to elbow-length apart,
each forms kātaḥka (Plate 4.2: 11, 8, 3).

In performance of hand-gestures, the eyes must
follow the hands, i.e., they trace the same pattern
as the hands.

Hand-gestures serve a number of purposes.
They are used to literally speak the text, and
deliberate in delivery follow the word order of
Sanskritized Malayalam. When serving this
purpose they range from literal, mimetic
representation of an easily recognizable object,
such as a ‘deer’ or ‘lotus,’ to signs for grammatical
construction, tense, case ending, etc., such as the
plural ending for a noun, or saying, ‘etc.’ When
casting, hand-gestures are often purely
decorative, accentuate the beauty and quality of
the movement in the dramatic context, and have
no literal or symbolic meaning.

As the student learns the immense vocabulary
of hand-gestures, he must also learn how to
perform the gestures while playing a character.
Kathakali training in central Kerala at the
Kalamandalam has evolved eight basic ways of
performing hand-gestures which are adapted to
the particular dramatic context of a scene. The
categories and qualities of mūdrams clustered in
each group include:

1. heroic gestures;
2. gestures for something or someone away
   from the body of the speaker such as ‘chariot,’
   giving an order, refusing a request;
3. powerful gestures such as ‘enemy,’
   ‘destruction,’ or ‘obstruction’;
4. gestures associated with the furious state
   such as ‘demon,’ ‘cruel,’ ‘anger’;
5. gestures for personal relationships such as
   ‘brother,’ ‘sister,’ ‘elder brother’;
6. gestures which describe the qualities of
   what is seen, such as ‘mountain,’ ‘brightness,’
   ‘black,’ ‘red,’ ‘clouds’;
7. gestures performed in the neutral,
   stationary position such as ‘lotus,’ ‘moon,’ ‘sun’;
8. gestures associated with the erotic and
   pathos in which the hands move from the left
to the right as the leg is closed such as
   ‘beautiful lady,’ ‘face,’ ‘lips,’ ‘eyes’.

Some patterns, like descriptive mūdrams, involve
considerable movement through space. The actor
usually begins by taking two steps forward, then
a ‘slap’ step to the side, and with large, sweeping
movements of the hands and arms he delivers a
mūdra like ‘mountain’ while stepping backward.
Although all hand-gestures have ‘set’ forms
through which their meanings are conveyed,
since actors do not vocalize their lines but speak
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bhava</th>
<th>Corresponding rasa</th>
<th>Basic state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. rati bhava</td>
<td>srna gara rasa</td>
<td>the erotic, love or pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. kusa bhava</td>
<td>hasya rasa</td>
<td>the comic, mirthful, or derision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. soka bhava</td>
<td>karuna rasa</td>
<td>pathos, sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. krodha bhava</td>
<td>rudra rasa</td>
<td>fiery, angry, wrath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. utsaha bhava</td>
<td>vira rasa</td>
<td>the heroic, vigorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. bhaya bhava</td>
<td>bhayanaka rasa</td>
<td>fear, the terrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. jugupsa bhava</td>
<td>bibhatsa rasa</td>
<td>repulsive, disgust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. vismaya bhava</td>
<td>adbhuta rasa</td>
<td>wondrous, marvellous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. sama bhava</td>
<td>santa rasa</td>
<td>peace, at-onement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. lajja (one of three special female expressions)</td>
<td>shyness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with their hands, in performance each hand gesture is always interpreted by the actor as he steps what he is saying to the specific state or mood appropriate to the character and scene.

In kathakali acting the face is a pliant vehicle for displaying the constantly shifting manifestations of the character’s inner states of being/doing [bhava]. The nine basic states [Plate 4.1] include: the erotic, love, or pleasure; the comic, mirthful, or derision; the pathetic/sadness; fury, anger, or wrath; the heroic/vigorous; the fearful or terrible; repulsive or disgust; the wondrous or marvellous; and peace or at- tainment. At first, each expression is learned technically through continuous repetition and correction. BEGINNING INSTRUCTION IN HOW TO

assume the basic facial expression for the erotic, love, or pleasure (rati bhava; sro gara rasa) is usually very technical, much like the following:

Open the upper lids as wide as possible. Keep the lower lids slightly closed. With the lips make a soft, relaxed smile, but do not show the teeth. Keep the gaze focused straight ahead. Having assumed this position, begin to flutter the eyebrows. Keeping the shoulders still, and using the neck, move the head first to the right, and then the left back and forth. While keeping the external focus fixed ahead on one point, move the head to a 45 degree angle to the right, continuing to flutter the eyebrows. Repeat to the left. [The focus sometimes moves to the right, and then the left.]

Similarly, instructions for assuming the comic or mirthful [haha bhava; hasyu rasa] are as follows:

Slightly raise the upper bridge of the nose between the eyebrows and slightly turn down the outsides of the eyebrows. Keep the eyelids slightly closed, and the lips drawn down on each side. Indent the upper lip muscles on the outsides.

In addition to the nine basic states, kathakali students also learn three other codified facial expressions associated with the playing of female roles, or for roles in which a male character imitates a woman, such as when Bhima impersonates Draupadi in The Killing of Kichaka. These include feminine shyness (injja), and spatial forms of contempt and anger.

After initiating the students technically in the performance of each expression, instructors sometimes prompt the student to engage his imagination:

I ask the student to imagine something.
Like for the heroic state, ‘imagine an elephant.’
For the erotic state, a ‘lotus.’
For the furious, imagine a ‘lion.’
For wonder, imagine a sudden action. I even do this with first-year students. I then ask them later in training if they are, for instance, performing wonder, ‘imagine being in a big city.’
Or ‘imagine being in a forest, seeing elephants, snakes,’ etc.

K. Kannan Nayar 1976, interview

Vasu Pisavarody asks his students to ‘show the feelings of an experience he can understand.’
Vemhayam Appukootthan Pillai explains the actor’s expression of bhava as

how we feel toward a person or thing. For example, sragara is the emotion we feel towards a thing or a person we like. When we see this person or thing, our mind is enlarged. Similarly, for hasyu, it is the feeling we get when we see a funny thing. Sorrow is the feeling we have when we experience difficulties, etc.

1993 interview

Gradually, over six to ten years of training, the student gains a ‘fuller understanding of the states of expression’ through reading and personal experience so that eventually he ‘realizes what he had done at first by [technically] moving his facial muscles isn’t enough’ (Vasu Pisavarody 1993, interview).

First-year students begin to apply their basic training in expressive states by learning some of the simpler minor roles in the repertory. As the student–actor learns more roles, he is gradually able to embody and manifest the nuances of each expressive state for different characters within different dramatic contexts. For example, ‘pathos [aruna] may be expressed as a state of unfulfilled desire, loss over the death of a person, etc.’ (ibid.).

The student realizes that there are differences in how each character expresses the same basic state – the Brahmin’s expression of pathos in The Progeny of Krishna is different from that of Dharmaputra. Panchali’s sorrow is different from that of Damayanti. Kathakali’s, initially, technical
and codified expressions are gradually individualized in playing particular characters.

Another important part of training today is providing students with the necessary linguistic tools to understand fully the nuances of kathakali’s highly Sanskritized poetic texts. Today some schools have followed the Kalamandalam’s lead by teaching Sanskrit to first-year students in order to give them a working knowledge of grammar and vocabulary relevant to performance. In addition, students also read Malayalam versions of the major epics and puranas to provide them with background information necessary to bring a full knowledge of their characters to the creation of a role. Without such knowledge, as student actors mature they would be unable to bring a subtler understanding of the characters they play to the stage.

By the end of their first year of training, students usually perform one or both of kathakali’s preliminary dances (purappedu and totayam) on the stage in full costume and make-up. Since students do not rehearse in costume and make-up before their first performance, it is both a rite of passage, as the student receives his teacher’s blessing, and a ‘trial by fire’, where he hopes for little more than simply making it through the entire choreography without losing his balance, getting distracted and forgetting what comes next, having his crown fall to one side of his head, or having his facial make-up (especially the paper frame) tear loose or fall off!

Intermediate and advanced training: colliyattam – learning and rehearsing stories

During their six to ten years of training, students are expected to learn every role in each play taught from the official school syllabus. From an active repertory of around forty to fifty plays, the syllabus at the Kerala Kalamandalam consists of eighteen plays covered in the regular six-year course of study, with two plays included in the post-graduate course of training (Figure 4.5). The plays in a school’s syllabus are selected to ensure that students receive training in all role-

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**Hands**

The hands are logical, the fingers are tongues, their silence is eloquent.

(*Aristotle* Cicero* enrolled*)

Everywhere the hand goes, the eye follows, and where the eye looks, thought follows, and where thought goes, feeling follows, and where feeling goes, our body moves.

(*Aristotle* Cicero* enrolled*)

Physiology and codification of the hands: Causation (the fixing of gestures, poses and movements into a code) can be considered as the transition from a daily technique to an extra-daily technique by means of an equivalent (cf. Equivalence).

This becomes obvious when one studies the codification of the hands in the various traditional Eastern theatres: the hand, whether it has a meaning, or its action makes, or whether it has no meaning, or has lost its meaning, as in the case of Balinese dancers, or pure Indian dance (mimetic), tends to retrace the dynamism of the "hand-in-life".

The hands, and above all the fingers, like the eyes, are continuously changing tensions and positions, both when we speak (articulating) and when we are acting or reacting in order to take, to push, to support ourselves, to carry. In the case of an action or reaction, the positions and tensions of the fingers change accordingly as soon as the eyes have transmitted the relevant information, as occurs, for example, when one is about to pick up a shred of broken glass or a bread crumb, or if one must hold a heavy dictionary or an inflated balloon. The autonomy of the fingers' organic movements is a sign of credibility; this is manifested by means of the tensions of the manipulative muscles, which are ready to act according to the weight, the fragility, the temperature, the volume, and the value of the object towards which the hand is extended, but also by means of the emotional state which the object evokes.

The hand acts, and acting, speaks. This speaking can be as literal as a word which represents something, or it can simply be like a sound, a pure vocal dynamic, which, when produced by the voice is the result of the continuous change of tensions and articulations of the vocal apparatus (lips, tongue, vocal cords). The hand is articulated like a sound which says nothing.

Hands which can have a meaning — both inside and outside the theatre — are used by North American Indians (LL1), deaf-mutes (Il-4), and criminals (IL5). In the theatre, the Indian codifications called kanti mukhi are the most elaborate.
Performing the Past, Wint 2000, Lecture 10

Hands

To draw the hand first start as if it were a pattern, and then put the two middle fingers in following this shape of the little finger. It is then placed in any fashion to prevent monotonous quality. It is often a good idea to exaggerate the shape of the thumb.

Cartoon hands are tricky—so below are drawn the average hand in all kinds of positions to give you some ideas. Notice that the fingers should be unevenly placed to prevent a monotone quality.

(Batte Hagarth, Drawing Dynamic Hands)

These statements by the American artist Battie Hagarth, famous for his famous illustrations (ill. 150), are taken from a drawing course for students at the New York School of Visual Arts, of which Hagarth himself is a founder. The interesting thing for us here is that the methods proposed by Hagarth, the anatomical analysis of movement, does not compromise expressiveness. On the contrary, certain anatomical details, such as the little finger’s shape of position, “colds” determine the drawing’s expressiveness.

Let us consider another example of the hand’s pre-expressiveness taken from a manual for cartoonists’ animation, Learn How to Draw Animal Cartoons, by Person S. Blair. The aim of this manual – to show how our animators – is similar to the aim of the performer who has no codification (ill. 141).

The cartoonists’ drawings and notes contain at least three precise pieces of information. Above all, the omission of one of the three middle fingers; the removal of this finger eliminates a superfluous element and puts the essential elements into relief. Secondly, there is a slight emphasis placed on one part of the hand – the base of the thumb – drawing attention to its importance for articulation and for the dialectic between the thumb and the other fingers. Finally, there is the repeated exclusion of uniformity in these drawings, as in the theatre, or stage, it is the fact that this finger changes which destroys monotony and breaks animation. It is the change of one finger from front to...
Indian hands and meaning

In Sanskrit, karma (hand, forearm and upper arm)  
these limb groups whose use dates  
back to sacred performances during the time of  
the Vedas around 1500 BCE; when the  
gestures were used by the priests while they  
recited the mantras, the religious formulas.  
There was also a traditionally fixed list of six  
mudras which represented Buddha’s gestures  
and corresponded to moments in his life.  
The introduction of the mudras to dance,  
begins in the classical period of Indian art,  
is described and codified in immeasurable  
treatises (many still in manuscript form) on  
the basis of which the various genres of  
Indian dance were founded, from Bharata  
Natyashastra, to Kathakali and Odissi dance  
and all the other less known but divine forms  
found in nearly all parts of India (cf.  
Rediscovery of Bahawalpur).  

Although the mudras usually have  
the same positions in all the dance forms, they  
have different names and uses. For example,  
in Bharata Natyashastra, there are 20 (or 52) mudras,  
while in Kathakali there are 24 and  
Odissi dance uses about 20 in common with  
other forms, which also have their own  
mudras. Based on these root mudras,  
Kathakali has developed the  
greatest number of mudra combinations,  
divided into three possibilities:  
samprada, the same mudra in both hands,  
manadana, a mudra in one hand only;  
samadana, a different mudra in each hand.  
Using these mudras in different ways  
in the space, in relationship to body and  
facial expression, the Kathakali performer  
can create a vocabulary consisting of  
about one hundred words.  

But the mudra characteristic, which is  
perhaps most interesting from the point of view  
of gestural expressivity is that used in  
relationship to the two principle categories  
into which all Indian dance-theatre and the  
very roots of codification are subdivided. In  
interpretative dance instead, the mudra have  
the real language value which we have  
spoke, that is, they have literal word  
meanings, in pure dance (bharata), which is always  
explicit in every dance performance, the  
mudra has a purely decorative value and  
are used as ‘pure signs’. Moreover, based on  
the elaboration into precise signs —  
hand/mudra: hands — there is a classification called  
hasta jiva, the life of the hands, which  
specifies the principle positions in which the  
hands can be placed. Here is the list of the  
hand positions:  
- karanaj: finger bent instead;  
- pravat: fingers bent backwords;  
- manadana: resting hands;  
- samadana: palm face downwords;  
- samprada: palm face upwards;  
- bhadra: resting fingers;  
- karana: fingers turning backwards;  
- bhagavati: separation or separation  
of fingers;  
- pazanar: relaxed or separated fingers  

This precise classification, created by  
text, which vary continuously from one  
meaning, one dynamic to another, which  
embellished the life of any actor’s hands, above  
and beyond all cultural codification.
Peter Brook, *Mahabharata* (1987)
scene from tape 3: the killing of Bhisma
warrior-priest on side of Kauravas
Amba’s suicide & reincarnation as Shikandin
frame-tale of Vyasa & Dhritarashtra

Edward Said, *Orientalism*; cultural legacy of imperialism
Gautam Dasgupta, “The Mahabharata: Peter Brook’s ‘Orientalism,’”

“On the political level, it cannot be denied that such [Orientalist] thinking continues to play a role in international affairs, “Orientalist” prejudices have not ceased to exist. Generalities about cultures continue to abound, and this is of course by no means the sole prerogative of the Occidental mind. But the question that concerns me is why so many artists in the West, particularly in the past few decades, have drawn upon Oriental themes and myths to spur their own creativity? Is it because, in all honesty, they do see the world as an organic whole, or is there implicit in their cross-fertilizing instincts a recognition of their own paucity of ideas? And, at worst, does the exoticism of the Orient, its different values and norms, somehow permit
them to evade criticisms of their cultures, supplanting what ought to be a vital
discourse on issues generated by their own society by a surrogate other-world
picture? There are by no means easy questions to answer, and nor am I suggesting
that we do away with all cross-cultural artistic endeavors. What concerns me is that
the representation of another culture’s artistic product address the lived, sensate
fabric of that borrowed cloth. And more, that such expressions of cultural give and
take not descend to banal generalities about the foreign culture, but seek to uncover
its specificities, its actual, and not merely perceived, links with its own society . . .
The *Mahabharata* is nothing, an empty shell, if it is read merely as a compendium
of martial legends . . . And that, precisely, is the reading attributed . . . by Carrière
and Brook” (10-11).

identity politics: its strengths & limits

2 examples:

a) the notion of “blackness” in the U.S.
b) the notion of a survey course